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FIRST AMERICAN EDITION SERIES

AXA

by Donne Avenell and Enrique Romero

● **THE BEGINNING** ●

● **THE CHOSEN** ●



Edited by Catherine Yronwode

Introduction by Maggie Thompson

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INTRODUCING AXA



B RITISH comic strips have a long and honorable tradition of removing clothes from women. In December 1932, artist-writer Norman Pett, via the British newspaper the *Daily Mirror*, introduced the world to *Jane*. Now, Jane was not the first artist's creation to be designed to attract an audience looking for pictures of pretty women. In the field of pen and ink illustration alone, Charles Dana Gibson had done so well at drawing attractive women of his day that an entire generation of women imitated the appearance of the "Gibson Girl" in the 1890s. And Gibson was hardly the first; not even counting *Jane*, Gibson was certainly not the last.



Coulton Waugh (in his 1947 *The Comics*) stated flatly that Polly (who began in *Positive Polly* for the New York *Journal* in 1912 – a strip which metamorphosed into *Polly and Her Pals*) “was the first true girlie girlie in strip history.” Cliff Sterrett’s masterpiece may or may not have been “the first true girlie girlie” daily comic strip. The fact remains that Gibson and Sterrett were part of a line of descent that led, by World War II, to a number of strips and panels in the U.S. Those were the strips and panel cartoons which featured shapely women in revealing costumes – from strips like Milton Caniff’s *Miss Lace* to Edgar Martin’s *Boots and Her Buddies*.

In the U. S., Waugh's "girlie girlie" strips were common enough, and it's possible to research their roots and branches via the San Francisco Academy of Comic Art's collection of American strips. It is not possible at this time to give similar treatment and study to British strips, unfortunately, nor to find out why it was considered proper for "family papers" in England to run comic strip art that couldn't be found in the U. S. outside publications aimed at "for men only" audiences.



Jane by Norman Pett

papers. When *Modesty Blaise*, for example, was in fairly common U. S. syndication, her original scanty apparel was covered for "family" consumption. At least *Blaise* operates in a world primarily controlled by logic and plot necessity. Her scripts (by the great Peter O'Donnell) are carefully done, and she does not usually appear in skivvies unless she is doing something requiring such apparel. Likewise, the London Daily Express Syndicate's contemporary adventure series *Amanda* contains frequent scenes of scanty dress and even semi-nudity (effectively barring it from American distribution). But as with *Modesty Blaise*, these are always dictated by the story line, rather than serving as a feeble excuse around which to construct a plot.

No matter how it happened, *Jane* became well known almost at once for its title character's ability to shed her clothes at the slightest excuse (a bath, an accidental dunk in the river, a change of clothes, or an attempt to climb through barbed wire). Poor Jane might be carefully secreted from the curious eyes of the strip's other characters (though she wasn't always safe in that regard, either), but the readers watched her assume a state of deshability about once a week. By early June 1942, she was seen skinny-dipping with little left to the readers' imaginations.

Accidental or deliberate disrobing aside, Jane was basically a Sweet Young Thing. Her relations with her dear Georgie Porgie were discreet — and seemed pretty much limited to moonlit romantic clinches. Her sexual innocence was preserved, though occasionally threatened. In 1959 she finally rowed into the sunset with her Georgie. (Later strips weren't by Pett; the last strip by Mike Hubbard even borrowed liberally from Alex Raymond.)

Jane may have been the first to shed her clothes in the interests of building morale in the pages of "family" papers. But she certainly did not long remain alone. In fact, above-the-waist nudity in British papers is almost a matter of routine; it is also one thing which helps keep British strips from being widely syndicated in U. S.



Amanda (unsigned, a Daily Express series)

Adventure strips are not the only ones to feature half-clothed British womanhood. Even the light domestic comedy series, such as Michael Kelly's *George and Lynne*, provide regular displays of flesh. One shudders to think of Dagwood and Blondie reading such comics in *their* newspaper.

Usually excuses for stripping British comic-strip heroines are as flimsy as their clothes. Even readers accustomed to the off-with-her-clothes tradition protested when Tiffany Jones appeared in her scanty underwear in the very *first* issue of her strip. But when it comes to science fiction series, the clothes really come off, and inhibitions with them. The Superman of British sf/fantasy comics, Garth, routinely has a long nude bedroom sequence with the heroine of each adventure.

And Scarth, a futuristic model who gets involved in espionage and interplanetary travel, rarely appears with clothes or without masculine attention for any appreciable length of time.

Which brings us to *Axa*.

This is a strip which recently began running in the London *Daily Express*, and it brings us the latest in stripper strips, not to mention "girlie girlies." (It's about time to put that term to rest; and if you're talking about *Axa*, you might even consider referring to her as a "laidy lady.")

You just can't call *Axa* stunningly original, though stunning she may be in other ways. Her plot seems born of *Logan's Run* and any number of after-the-foul-up sf stories — with a world divided between the regimented few in the city, and the brutal, barbaric, free-but-endangered (and often mutated) life outside. The artwork on the strip is by Enrique Romero, who is probably best known to American comics fans as the artist who took over *Modesty Blaise* after the death of Jim Holdaway; he did that strip for an even longer time than Holdaway.

It is probably Romero's art that will most please most readers. One dealer, announcing the upcoming publication of this very volume, commented, "The poor girl can't seem to keep her clothes on, making this surprisingly adult material for a daily strip." As a matter of fact, she tends to pop her clothes off and on at the slightest excuse. It can almost become a game, working out what has happened to them from panel to panel — playing Follow the Bouncing Bra for example. She strips all her clothes off in the third strip but is already using the torn-off fragments to fashion a loincloth in the fourth; by the next day she has managed to rig a strapless bra — why isn't clear — but half of it pops off by the eighth strip. And so it goes. On again, off again, partly on, etcetera.

She also manages to do a fair amount of bed-hopping for a "family" newspaper heroine. No doubt about it, this is not a comic strip you'll be likely to find next to *Blondie* and *Peanuts* in your local daily. Donne Avenell (who also once wrote *Tiffany Jones*, as well as the comics adaptations of Hammer horror films) tends to write very straightforward stories, getting *Axa* from sex to violence and back with few pauses for memorable speeches or sophisticated science fiction concepts.

Enjoy these first two stories in the *Axa* saga. They're part of a British tradition, though not the British tradition that would occur to most people. Comics fans who know about *Jane* and *Modesty Blaise* and *Romeo Brown* and *Scarth* and the many other British strips with displays of female skin will recognize influences and fit *Axa* into its proper comics niche.



George and Lynne by Michael Kelly

























YOU'RE WASTING YOUR TIME, MARJ. SHE DOESN'T KNOW WHAT'S GOOD FOR HER!

PET'S UNKIND... BUT SHE'S RIGHT. IT'S GOOD TO HAVE BABIES... GOOD FOR THE SETTLEMENT...

















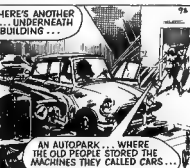


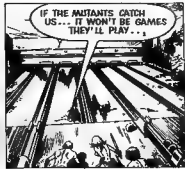


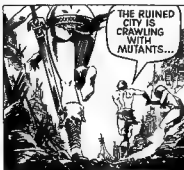










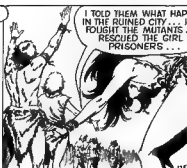




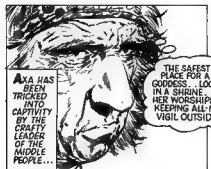














HE CAME DOWN HERE
TO FIGHT THE GREAT
CONTAMINATION...
AND LOST...



HE DIDN'T
ESCAPE, POOR
DEVIL... BUT
I WILL...



YES!



I'VE COME
OUT BEHIND
THE DERELICT
HOUSE...



HAIL,
AXA?

GODDESS OF
THE MIDDLE
PEOPLE?

THE FOOLS
THINK I'M STILL
LOCKED INSIDE
THEIR STUPID
SHRINE!



ALL I NEED NOW
IS...MY SWORD...



MATT TOOK MY
SWORD AWAY...
AND THIS IS
HIS HUT...



HE'S
ASLEEP...



WITH MY
SWORD BESIDE
HIM...



TRYING TO ESCAPE FROM
THE MIDDLE PEOPLE, AXA
NEEDS HER SWORD...



I MUSTN'T
WAKE MATT... HE
HELPED MAYOR TO
TRAP ME... HE'S
MY ENEMY NOW...



OH!





AXA AND MATT
ESCAPE FROM
THE HUT...



BUT I'M
A WOMAN...
AND I WON'T
LET THOSE
SPINELESS
PEOPLE OF
YOURS
FORGET
IT!

YOU
HANDLED
THAT SWORD
LIKE A MAN,
EVA!



THEY'RE ALL ROUND US,
AXA... WE'LL NEVER
GET OUT OF HERE
ALIVE...



SO WE'LL DIE...
FIGHTING...



WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?
KILL THE DEVIL-WOMAN!



AAH!



MATT!
THEY'VE...
GOT ME, AXA...



I'M WOUNDED,
AXA...

SAVE YOURSELF,
WHILE YOU STILL
HAVE THE
CHANCE!



BUT I CAN'T
LEAVE YOU HERE,
MATT...

NOW— THE
WOMAN! KILL
THE WOMAN!



RUN, AXA! THERE'S NO NEED FOR
US BOTH TO DIE!

MAYBE
YOU'RE
RIGHT...



MATT WOUNDED, AXA MENACED BY THE
MOB OF MIDDLE PEOPLE...
AT LAST
YOU'RE LEARNING
SOME SENSE, AXA!
FIRST RULE IN THIS
WORLD... LOOK
AFTER YOURSELF!



HE THINKS
I'M RUNNING
AWAY...

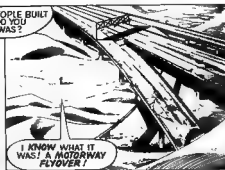
... LEAVING
HIM TO BE
SLAUGHTERED...



... BUT HE'S
WRONG!

H-HUN?













IF I'M STRONG,
IT'S BECAUSE I HOPE!
THERE MUST BE A
BETTER WORLD THAN
THE SICK ONE WE LIVE IN!



SO WE'LL BUILD THAT WORLD,
MATT... YOU AND I, AND PEOPLE
LIKE US... A HEALTHY WORLD,
FIT FOR HUMAN BEINGS...



WE WON'T
LOOK BACK TO
THE PAST,
LIKE THE
MIDDLE
PEOPLE...



OR SEAL OURSELVES
OFF FROM REALITY LIKE MY
PEOPLE OF THE DOME...

WE'LL FIGHT TOGETHER...
WITH OUR FACES TO THE FUTURE!
THAT'S WHY YOU'VE GOT TO
LIVE, MATT!



MATT?



NO, MATT!
I NEED YOU!
YOU CAN'T
LEAVE ME!



OH, MATT... WHY
DID YOU HAVE TO
DIE?



MATT HAS DIED
IN THE RUINED
FLYOVER...



I NEEDED YOUR
STRENGTH, MATT...
AND YOUR TENDERNES
... YOUR LOVE...



TO FACE
THE FUTURE...
ALONE...

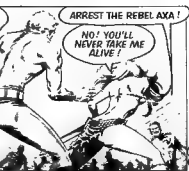














AXA BROUGHT BACK, A PRISONER, TO THE DOMED CITY...

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOOD FOR YOU, WOMAN!

ENOUGH OF THIS FREEDOM NONSENSE! GET HER INSIDE!



